



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR NATURAL RESOURCES TO MEET JAN. 3

DES MOINES - The advisory committee directed by the Iowa Legislature to explore sustainable funding for Iowa's natural resources will conduct its next meeting on Wednesday, January 3, 2007. Discussions will begin at 10 a.m., at the Des Moines Botanical Center, 909 Robert D. Ray Drive, in Des Moines.

The committee's preliminary report is complete and will be delivered to the Governor and General Assembly by January 10. This meeting will discuss plan presentation needs and future tasks.

The committee's report specifically was required to contain at least the following:

- Information on what surrounding states have done to provide sustainable funding for natural resource conservation.
- Outline of a conservation funding initiative agreed upon by the advisory committee.
- Outline of the amount of revenue needed and what would be accomplished if the conservation funding initiative is implemented.
- Analysis of Iowa's citizens' willingness to pay for identified conservation funding initiative.

The committee is chaired by the Department of Natural Resources. Other committee representatives include members from both houses and both parties of the Iowa Legislature, Conservation Districts of Iowa, Ducks Unlimited, Farmers Union, Iowa Association of County Conservation Boards, Iowa Environmental Council, Iowa Farm Bureau, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, Izaak

Walton League of Iowa, Pheasants Forever, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Sierra Club and The Nature Conservancy.

The public is invited to attend committee deliberations on January 3. For additional information, contact Doug Harr, DNR staff assistant to committee, at 515-275-4815, or email doug.harr@dnr.state.ia.us. A complete summary of committee work to date may be found at <http://www.iowadnr.com/sustainablefunding/index.html>.

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(Hold until Dec. 28)

WINTER EAGLES

Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

In the depths of an icy cold Iowa winter, there is one guarantee. You will see bald eagles below the Guttenberg locks...lots of them. Or at Bellevue; or below the tailwaters of any other Mississippi River community with a Corps of Engineers lock and dam. The Des Moines River, too, has hosted hundreds of eagles each winter in the past decade. So, as I pulled up to the curb along Guttenberg's riverside park a couple days ago, the eagle count was exactly...zero.

The missing link, of course, is the 'icy cold Iowa winter.' I already had spotted a couple dozen eagles on the drive up; one here, two there, a few more in a tree line, miles inland from the Big River. And until - or unless - we ever get a cold snap and blanket of snow covering the state, that's where you're going to find them this winter season...inland. "Bald eagles are not going to concentrate on these (tailwater) areas until it is the only place they can get food," explains Department of Natural Resources wildlife biologist Bruce Ehresman. "Right now, they can get food in lots of different places. There are still a lot of eagles, way up north. They haven't had to come down, because the river sand streams there are still pretty much open."

That eagles are here *at all*, is a conservation miracle. Nearly extirpated from the Lower 48 States due to overuse of pesticides and loss of habitat after World War II, their slow comeback has ramped up in the last decade. Winter bald eagle counts used to tally a few hundred. Now (2004, specifically) the count hit 4,400. Nesting eagles have skyrocketed, too, in the Hawkeye State.

During a more typical winter, river tailwaters remain open; with ice forming only as the agitation and current action recede downstream. Fish moving through the locks are stunned, providing easy meals for the regal birds of prey. Like any wild animal, they are expending as little energy as possible to survive the winter. If they can perch in one of the nearby cottonwood trees, leaving to pick off a stunned shad or two, they will; avoiding a day of soaring and scouting the smaller river corridors inland. That is where they will

feed on post-deer season carcasses or other dead animals left in the fields. They might be our nation's symbol, but they are still opportunists. In the middle of winter, a meal is a meal.

So, you're not going to see large concentrations of eagles soaring, swooping and perching below the churning locks, for awhile. You will see them inland, though, over farm fields or along smaller streams. "Eagles are still going to be found primarily up and down the rivers," says Ehresman. "Fish make up 60 percent of their diet. As long as we have open water, there will certainly be eagles (nearby)."

It has become fairly common to see them, though you have to be looking up, most of the time. Talking eagles with a reporter a few days ago, she admitted (having only lived in Iowa for a year or two) that she still had never seen one in the wild. I gave her a couple nearby locations and told her I'd check back in a couple weeks. A lot of times, people will call an immature bald eagle a hawk; since it does not yet bear the snow white head and tail feathers. Other times, the soaring and banking birds might be a little too far off to pinpoint as eagles. But they're there.

Running my dog near the Coralville Reservoir, it's routine to see a couple eagles riding air drafts, looking for fish in the backwater bays. I've also seen one perched in the same tree, the last couple times out. In more urban settings, bald eagles have become regular winter visitors, too. In Iowa City-Coralville, it's pretty routine to see a couple perched near the old Iowa Light and Power dam on the Iowa River. In Des Moines, eagle watchers are the first sign; as I pass a parked car, with a guy leaning over the Des Moines River bridge railing, binoculars or spotting scope trained on the trees upstream. In Cedar Rapids, a good spot is in the trees along the Cedar River, below May's Island. In each case, of course, colder is better. The more ice and snow on the rest of the landscape, the better your chance to see an eagle near the remaining open water.

Wildlife biologists and conservationists will be out in the next few weeks; trying to pin down a rough population count for this winter. The North American Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey is conducted each January; a snapshot of how many eagles are out there. Volunteers tally eagles in designated survey routes, often following inland streams as well as the bigger rivers. "Typically by the survey dates, the rivers are frozen and eagles are concentrated," says Ehresman. "In Iowa, about 60 percent will be counted along the Mississippi River. Another 20 percent you find along the Des Moines River. Smaller numbers, then, are tallied along other open streams. As long as there's open water and fish availability, there will be eagles nearby."

That wasn't always the case. With their 20th Century comeback extending, though, it's something eagle watchers can bank on, over the next 100 years.

Bald Eagle Days

You can head out to look for eagles anytime, by yourself. You can also get an assist, at any of the Bald Eagle Appreciation Days set across the state. "They are a great

place, if you don't know much about eagles," urges Bruce Ehresman, Iowa DNR wildlife diversity biologist. "They have live eagles on display and professional people who talk about them. You also can go down by the river and view eagles through spotting scopes; to learn more about eagle behavior."

Bald Eagle Days are set in a dozen communities this winter. For more Eagle watch information, click on www.missriver.org. Several also offer special school programs the day before.

January

6-7...QCCA Expo Center, 2621 4th Avenue, Rock Island. (for information, call 309-794-5338 or 309-788-2543)

6...Clinton, (call 815-259-3628)

13-14...Guttenberg

13...Dubuque, lock and dam 11 (call 563-556-4372)

13...Muscatine, lock and dam 16 (call 563-263-7913)

13 (through February 18, weekends only)...Mississippi River Visitors Center
(reservations required, 309-794-5338)

20-21...Keokuk River City Mall (800-383-1219)

27-28...LeClaire (563-322-3911 ext 120)

28...Quincy, lock and dam 21 (217-228-0890)

February

9-10...Red Rock Reservoir (641-828-7522)

25...Saylorville Reservoir (515-276-4656)

March

3...Linn Grove

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STATE PRESERVES BOARD TO MEET JAN. 5 IN DES MOINES

DES MOINES – The State Preserves Advisory Board will meet at 10 a.m., Jan. 5, in the fourth floor conference room, Wallace State Office Bldg., in Des Moines. The meeting is open to the public.

Members of the State Preserves Advisory Board are Deborah Lewis, Carl Kurtz, Laura Jackson, Scott Moats, Armando Rosales, Cynthia Peterson and Liz Christiansen, deputy director of the DNR

A more detailed agenda is available on the Iowa DNR's website www.iowadnr.com under State Parks / Preserves, then click on Preserves Advisory Board link.

The following is the meeting agenda.

- Approve Agenda
- Approve Minutes of September Meeting
- Request for Proposals for Fiscal Year 2008
- Brushy Creek Trail
- Vincent Bluff
- Preserves Updates
 - Anderson Prairie
 - Silver Lake Fen
 - Marietta Sand Prairie
 - Steele Prairie
 - Iowa Prairie Network Project
 - Sheeder Prairie Workday
 - Hawkeye Wildlife Area
- Preserve Managers Conference
- Open Discussion

For more information, contact John Pearson at 515-281-3891.

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TWO VIDEOS ADDED TO DNR WEBSITE

DES MOINES - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has added videos on feral hogs and the Rathbun Fish Hatchery walleye program to its website, www.iowadnr.gov.

The feral hogs video shows the damage wild hogs can do to the landscape and their impact on other wildlife. Iowa Western College produced the video.

Collection, raising and stocking walleyes at the Rathbun Fish Hatchery is covered in the other video. The Iowa DNR produced the video.

The videos require Windows Media Player for viewing. There is a link to download the player for free, if needed. Click on "DNR Online Videos" under the "Additional Information" heading in the navigation column on the left side of the webpage. Then select either the broadband or dial up connection.

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